"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great Light."—Isaiah 2:9.

A BRIEF HISTORY

...OF...

St. Thomas' Church

PHILADELPHIA, PENNA.

Founded :: :: 1794

114th Anniversary • Nov. 1, 1908

Dr. W. E. Burghardt Dubois says: "There is no question but that St. Thomas' is the oldest legally organized body among colored people in the world."

1908

A. V. C. CARTIER, RECTOR.

LEWIS M. MINTESS, RECTOR'S WARDEN.

RICHARD J. WARRICK, SR., ACCOUNTING WARDEN.

JAMES H. WILLIAMS, SECRETARY.

JOHN W. JONES,
JOHN W. HOLLAND,
LOUIS KING,
JOHN W. LOVE,
WARLEY BASCOM.
S. CLIFTON MOSELEY,
LOUIS A. POTTER,
C. PRESTON SLOWE,
JAMES F. NEEDHAM,

A BRIEF HISTORY

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Founded :: :: 1794

Chronology of St. Thomas' P. E. Church

May 17, 1787—Free African Society founded. Absalom Jones administered at its organization.

1792—Free African Society disbanded. Ground at Fifth and Adelphi streets purchased. Feb. 17th, erection of the first edifice owned by a corporate body begun.

1793—First purchase money, being funds in the Free African Society at disbandment, contributed by Cyrus Bustill, Samuel Boston, John Morris and Peter Sharpless.

July 17, 1794—First service in Church. First sermon by Rev. Samuel Magaw, Rector of St. Paul's Church (text, Isaiah 9: 2: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light,") assisted by Rev. James Abercrombie, of Christ and St. Peter's churches.

Among the original members were James Forten, James Mintess, John Emory, William Wiltshire, Mark Stephenson, William Gray, William White, William Gardiner and Henry Stewart.

1795—Absalom Jones ordained to Deaconate by Bishop William White.

1796—Legal Incorporation. Insurance Company started and operated for some time; Absalom Jones, President, and the rest of its officers were members of St. Thomas' Church.

1804—Absalom Jones ordained to priesthood; Bishop White officiating. A day school started.

1809—A Society was formed for the suppression of vice and immorality by the men of St. Thomas'.

1810—James Cook Summers, of Jamaica, W. I., came as assistant to the rector. He brought about discontent, started a church at Seventh and Jayne streets, which lasted a short while and then disappeared.

Solomon Clarkson called as successor to James Cook Summers, but failed to qualify. He was vestry clerk for twenty years and was never late or absent.

1812—Absalom Jones, James Forten and Richard Allen were appointed a Committee by the Mayor to raise a brigade of colored soldiers.

1816—Absalom Jones, out of personal friendship, placed his hands on Richard's Allen's head in consecration, after the first A. M. E. Conference had elected him Bishop.

1817—Absalom Jones and James Forten were officers at the first Secular Convention ever held by colored men in protest of Colonization.

1818—Absalom Jones died and was buried in the graveyard adjoining the first Church.

For several years from 1818, Bishop White, Revs. Drs. Magaw, Blackwell and Abercrombie filled the pulpit by turns.

1819—Prince Sannders of the West Indies was a candidate for the rectorship, made vacant by the death of Absalom Jones, but was refused for failure to prove a clean bill of moral health at his home.

1822—Rev. James Wiltbank, a chaplain in the navy, officiated for several years.

1824—Joseph Harding, of St. Paul's Church, started a Sunday-school.

1826—Rev. P. Van Pelt, of South Carolina, was the priest in charge for several years.

1831—Rev. Jacob M. Douglass served the parish three years.

1833—St. Thomas' Church built the first pipe organ of any colored church in the United States, with Ann Appo as organist.

1834—Rev. William Douglass became rector and served faithfully until his death in 1862.

1862—Rev. William J. Alston became rector and served sincerely for ten years.

1864—Admitted as a member of the Diocesan Committee.

1872—From 1872 until 1882 the Church's spiritual interests were under Revs. Robert J. Bowen, Henry L. Phillips, P. Fuget, William Jarrett and William Heaton.

1882—Rev. John Pallam Williams, a baptized child and a confirmed member, became rector, serving for ten years.

1888—The original Church, Fifth and Adelphia streets, sold.

1888—From 1888 until 1892 the place of worship was in Durham Hall at Seventeenth and South streets.

1892—Present building opened for worship.

1893—Rev. Owen M. Waller called to the rectorship and served three years.

1894—Centennial Anniversary of Parish celebrated fittingly; Bishops Potter, N. Y.; Coleman, Del.; Nelson, of Georgia; Nicholson, Wisconsin; and Whittaker, of Penn, taking part.

1896—Rev. W. C. Starr and Rev. John H. Simons, Priests in charge.

1897—Rev. E. G. Knight was Priest in charge for five years.

1902—Rev. G. A. McGuire called to the rectorship, serving four years.

1905—Rev. A. C. V. Cartier, Priest in charge from May 1st, called to rectorship January 1st, 1906, present incumbent.

A BRIEF HISTORY

...OF THE...

Parish of St. Thomas

SINCE we, as members of St. Thomas' Church, are celebrating the 114th Anniversary of its Founding, it has been suggested that a short history of the Church would be most fitting on such an occasion for the benefit of those who have had neither the time nor the opportunity to learn of its progress through the many years of toil and labor, and the trials and difficulties encountered both previous and subsequent to the erection of our original building.

About one hundred and twenty years ago no church edifice could be found throughout the country owned and controlled exclusively by persons of color. The religiously disposed among them were then under the necessity of worshipping in churches belonging to their white brethren, and as Methodism addressed itself chiefly to the feelings and affections, the great majority gave their adherence to that belief. In those days even that denomination of Christians could lay claim to but one house of worship in Philadelphia. This was situated on Fourth street below Vine and known by the title of St. George's Church. Here it was that the larger portion of the colored population of the city assembled from time to time on occasions of public worship and they in common with others, gave vent to their devotional feelings without hindrance. They had comfortable seats on the lower floor of that building, to which there was no objection made until the increasing numbers of the congregation afforded a plea, to those invested with power, for their removal to the gallery. But as they had contributed their mite toward paying for the building in which all seats were free, they did not readily yield to this unfair proposal. This expressed desire, however, soon rose to an imperious order, and the pressure was so great that these men of color deemed it useless to contend any longer against the odds

that opposed them. This stern command was followed by a forcible act, resorted to by one of the officials; and, to the lasting shame of those who sanctioned the measure, it was enforced at a time when the assembly was invoking the blessings of the common Father of all, Who **"Is no respecter of persons," "and willeth all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth."** With the enforcement of this command the entire body of colored people walked out of the church, and before the close of that eventful Lord's day the noble determination was formed to worship the Lord under their "own vine and fig tree" without molestation from any.

The Free African Society

We find under the preamble that on 4th month 12, 1778, "Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, two men of the African race, who, for their religious life and conversation have obtained a good report among men, these persons from a love to the people of their complexion, whom they behold with sorrow because of their irreligious and uncivilized state, often communed together upon this painful and important subject in order to form some kind of religious society, but there being too few to be found under the like concern, and those who were differed in their religious sentiments; with these circumstances they labored for some time, till it was proposed, after a serious communication of sentiments, that a Society should be formed, without regard to religious tenets, provided, the persons lived an orderly and sober life, in order to support one another in sickness, and for the benefit of their widows and fatherless children."

These same obscure but worthy men, who, animated by the spirit of the times, resolved to introduce a better order of things, had many difficulties to surmount before they could proceed a step toward the accomplishment of the object desired. The great question for solution, in the first place, was to effect a union among themselves. Unaccustomed to organization of any kind, few in number and without pecuniary means, the most favored among them without the advantages of a liberal education, to have immediately proposed, under these circumstances, the establishment of a church would have been considered impracticable and vis-

ionary. But a successsful plan of union at length presented itself, which was to form an organization having the two-fold objects of a beneficial and moral reform Society. It was called "THE FREE AFRICAN SOCIETY," and was founded April 12th, 1787.

The Society, as it appears from the minutes, met at the house of Richard Allen, monthly, up to May, 1788. His room at this period being too small for the accommodation of the increased number of members, a more commodious room was rented in the house of Sarah Dougherdy. Here the Society continued its regular meetings up to December 28th, 1788. From this time up to 1791 the monthly meetings were held in "Friends' Free African School House," situated in Willing's Alley, removed since to Raspberry street. At this period a proposal was made by the Standing Committee of the Society to establish a religious meeting. The proposition was generally approved of by the members, and the committee was accordingly instructed to procure a room for the purpose. They succeeded in obtaining one from Joseph Sharpless. In this room they met for the first time together for religious worship January 1st, 1791, at 3 P. M. It is interesting to note, therefore, how they advanced step by step from the beginning to the accomplishment of their ultimate design—the formation of "The African Church."

A very important movement in that direction was the appointment of a Committee whose business, besides that of calling special meetings and disposing of the moneys in hand to the best advantage, was to inspect the conduct of its members and to report the same at one of the monthly meetings of the Society.

From all that appears in the minutes there seems to have been no devotional exercises at the opening of the meetings. The first recommendation of the kind was not made by the Committee until November 15th, 1788.

It is also worthy of notice that shortly after this the name of Richard Allen no longer appears as an active member among the brethren, though his friendship for Absalom Jones endured until they were separated by death.

Data in the form of letters shows that there were similar societies of Free Blacks in Newport and Boston, though

The African Church of Philadelphia, latterly known as St. Thomas', was unquestionably the first set aside for the specific purpose of worship for colored people.

The next thing worthy of special notice is the proposal of the Committee for religious meeting, offered for the consideration of the Society, September 18th, 1790.

After a few years further existence of the Society we turn over a new leaf.

The sayings and doings of the old "Free African Society" as such, now come to a close, and that association might be left to stand by itself as a solitary but pleasing reminiscence of the past, were it not so intimately connected with what still remains in active operation, and into which it so beautifully merges,—the present St. Thomas' Church.

Watching the progressive movements of the Society has been exceedingly gratifying; its noble aim in the first place was to call into active operation the humane and tender sympathies of the heart towards the sick and needy. It soon afterward became alive to the importance of the intellectual and moral improvement of the race, and finally it reorganizes for the purpose of promoting the interests of that Divine plan which is the only true elevator of mankind—"The Gospel of Christ."

At this incipient stage we now enter upon the task of recording some of the History of St. Thomas' Church itself.

Under date of February 17th, 1792, it appears from the title deed that the lots on which St. Thomas' Church originally stood, on Fifth street below Walnut, were purchased "by William Gray, Absalom Jones, Wm. White, William Wiltshire, William Gardiner and Henry Stewart, of Joseph B. McKean and his wife Hannah for the sum of £450, lawful money of the State of Pennsylvania."

The officers and members of the new organization were styled "Elders and Deacons of the African Church," and the first business attended to, subsequent to the last meeting held, was to satisfy all such members who preferred to withdraw the money they had invested in the old Society to having it transferred to the funds of the new enterprise. Plans were then perfected for the building of the first Church and work began February 17th, 1792. The details respecting the progress of the work we conceive to be unnecessary;

sufficient has been said to demonstrate the great prudence, energy and perseverance those humble but noble pioneers displayed in entering upon and carrying on to its completion the great and good work they had in hand. It is a still more inspiring picture to behold the building prepared and opened for the first time for the purpose of public worship, July 17th, 1794. The Church property was located on Fifth street below Walnut, west side. It was the fourth Protestant Episcopal Church to be built in Philadelphia (within city limits) and the only one erected between 1761 and 1800.† On the occasion of the opening of the said Church, the first sermon was preached by the Rev. Samuel Magaw, Rector of St. Paul's Church,* and prayers were read by the Rev. Dr. James Abercrombie, Second Assistant Minister of Christ's Church and St. Peter's.† The African Church, through the Founders and Trustees, resolved to conform themselves to the Protestant Episcopal Church of North America. They dedicated the edifice to the memory of St. Thomas the apostle, and decreed henceforth that the Church was to be known by the name and title of St. Thomas' African Episcopal Church of Philadelphia. The Trustees were nobly assisted by Dr. Samuel Magaw and Dr. Robert Blackwell.

The name of Absalom Jones, a former slave, but a man of good report and Christian forbearance, was then presented as a candidate for orders. On October 21st, 1794, Mr. Jones accepted the call and was ordained to the Deacon's orders by Bishop William White, August, 1795, and was later reported by Bishop White as Priest in 1804.

The first election of the vestry was held March 28th, 1796, in which John Exeter and William Gray were the Wardens, and John Emory, Clerk, of the Church. In 1794 the number of members was 246, and in the next year the names of persons recorded in the aggregate were 427, almost twice the number of the preceding year.

The Church was incorporated March 26th, 1796, at a meeting held at the residence of Bishop William White

† Scharf and Westcott. History of Philadelphia. Vol. II, pages 1348, 1349.

* "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." —Isaiah 9 : 2.

(still standing, 1908), 309 Walnut street. The Justices of the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania : Thomas McKean, Chief Justice ; Edward Shippen, Joseph Yeats, and Thomas Smith, Esqs., having duly examined the instrument of writing, passed the conditions set forth and contained therein as lawful, and with the authority of the Commonwealth of the State, the Governer, Thomas Mifflin, affixed his seal of office October 27th, 1796. In 1804 a day school for the instruction of youth was established by the vestry, to be placed under their direction and control. The expenses of the instruction were first defrayed from the trust of Rev. James Bray the American Missionary. The vestry finally gave up the control of the school and placed it in the hands of Solomon Clarkson, one of its members.

In 1808 the Rev. Absalom Jones wrote and published his views against Colonization, which brought forth a resolution of inquiry, offered by United States Senator Rutledge, of South Carolina.

In 1809 a society was formed by the leading colored men of the city for the suppression of vice and immorality among the people of their own race. It was composed of members belonging to different denominations of Christians and brought forth words of commendation from the Hon. William Tilghman, Chief Justice of the State of Pennsylvania, and the great American patriot, Benjamin Franklin. By a certain financial arrangement, truly benevolent, of William Bradford, Esq., made before his death in 1793, between Dr. Benjamin Rush and Bishop White, St. Thomas' Church secured possession of the parsonage, situated on Powell street between Fifth and Sixth and Spruce and Pine, in 1809.

After 22 years of service as minister the Rev. Absalom Jones departed this life February 13th, 1818, aged 71 years.

Several years before his death in 1812, Absalom Jones, James Forten and Richard Allen were appointed a committee by the Mayor for the purpose of raising a brigade of soldiers, which they did with considerable success ; 3,000 having been mustered in on Independence Square.

During the four years immediately succeeding the death of Absalom Jones, St. Thomas' Church was without any

settled minister. Bishop White, Rev. Drs. Magaw, Abercrombie and Blackwell, when convenient, kindly supplied the pulpit by turns. Cato Collins, in the absence of a clergyman, acted as lay reader, to which office he had been previously appointed.

January 28th, 1822, Mr. Russell Parrott, a regular communicant member of the Church and a very talented young man, was by resolution of the vestry taken up as a suitable person to be recommended as a candidate for orders. He was licensed as lay reader by the Bishop the following month. But the selection failed to give the general satisfaction desired. Hence, with a view of restoring harmony in the Church a resolution was passed by the vestry at a regular stated meeting held April 20th, 1822, to release Mr. Parrott from any further obligation to serve them in the capacity of a reader. This promising young man died August 3rd, 1824. As a tribute to his memory a society styled "The Sons of St. Thomas" (two others co-operating) had a monumental slab erected at the head of his grave.

March 20th, 1822, the vestry succeeded in obtaining the clerical services of Rev. James Wiltbank, who continued in the faithful performance of his pastoral duties up to the month of February, 1825, at which time he resigned and accepted a call to the rectorship of St. Matthew's Church, Francesville.

In the summer of 1826 the Rev. P. Van Pelt, of South Carolina, was called to the pulpit, but owing to a previous engagement in the South he did not enter upon his duties as rector until June, 1827. During the three years of his administration he was very successful, through the Divine blessing upon his labors, in promoting true and vital godliness among the people of his charge In 1829 he presented to Bishop White 44 persons for confirmation. The Sunday-school flourished. An organ was introduced in the Church for the first time at his suggestion and Ann Appo was the first organist.

In February, 1831, Rev. Jacob M. Douglass was called to the pastoral charge and resigned August 17th, 1834, to be succeeded by the Rev. William Douglass September 17th of the same year. The Rev. William Douglass served faithfully in his pastoral duties up to the time of his death in

1862. He was the first writer of history and the author and publisher of a volume of original sermons among colored people of the United States. He was succeeded in 1862 by the Rev. William J. Alston who served in that capacity for ten years.

From 1872 to 1882 the Church's spiritual interests were under Revs. Robert J. Bowen, Henry L. Phillips, P. Fuget, William Jarrett and William Heaton.

In 1882 John Pallam Williams, a baptized child and a confirmed member, became rector, serving ten years.

In 1888 the original Church at Fifth and Adelphi streets was sold and from that time until the present structure was completed, worship was continued at Durham Hall, 17th and South streets.

In 1892 the present structure was opened for public worship.

In 1893 Rev. Owen M. Waller was called to the rectorship and served three years.

In 1894 the Centennial Anniversary of the Church was celebrated.

The spiritual welfare of the Church was looked after during the year 1896 by Revs. W. C. Starr and John H. Simons as priests in charge.

In 1897 Rev. Edward G. Knight came to the parish as priest in charge and remained five years.

In 1902 Rev. G. Alexander McGuire was called to the rectorship, serving nearly four years.

Rev. A. C. V. Cartier was priest in charge from May 1st, 1905. Called to rectorship January 1st, 1906. Present incumbent.

In the 114 years of church life there have been many **virile** movements.

The first Sunday-school of its own was in 1828, with Robert Gordon as superintendent.

The Rev. Dr. Alexander Crummell was in charge of the parish during the absence in Europe of Rev. William Douglass, the rector.

The Church was always catholic, and the lecture-room in the old building was freely given to the public for anti-slavery meetings, library, musical and other like purposes.

Few churches possess such relics of antiquity, connecting them with their early history, as St. Thomas', among which may be mentioned:

The first communion table.
The christening bowl used by the first rector.
Old chairs and settee used at the opening in 1794.
Church records from 1787 to date (nearly complete).
Written and printed matter of the Free African Society.
The instrument of ordination by Bishop White in 1795.
The ancient chair used by the presiding officer.
Sons of St. Thomas, and other rare curios.

The Church is well supplied with memorials, and among the donors are the Rev. Herman Batterson, Mrs. Amy Cassey, Mrs. John C. Bowers, Mrs. Isabella L. Stevens and sisters, Mrs. Blanche Warrick Cardoza, Miss Susie Cook, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. P. Allmond, Mrs. Irvin, Miss Mary Frances Cole, Miss Ellen Moore, Miss Helen Stevens, Miss Henrietta Edwards, the Sunday-school, Richard E. D. R. Venning, Mrs. Celestine Thomas, Lewis M. Mintess, Samuel Venning, various Confirmation Classes, Wm. A. Potter, Sr., Mrs. Virginia Dorsey and family, William C. Bollivar, and others.

The Church Organizations are:

THE ALTAR GUILD—Organized in 1886; Miss Amelia E. Mills, President. Miss Daisy Christiansen, Pres., 1908.

ST. THOMAS' GUILD—Organized 1890 by Rev. J. P. Williams, Rector. S. Clifton Moseley, President, 1908.

KING'S DAUGHTERS—Organized 1890. Mrs. Mary Montier, President.

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY—Organized June 2, 1894; Rev. O. M. Waller, President. Mrs. M. J. Burr, Pres., 1908.

ST. THOMAS' CHAPTER, BROTHERHOOD OF ST. ANDREW—Organized 1893; George P. Titus, Director. Ferdinand Bell, Director, 1908.

THE JUNIOR AUXILIARY—Organized 1902. Miss L. C. Miller, Leader.

ACOLYTES' GUILD—Organized 1907. Harold Trulear, President.

CHOIR ORGANIZATION—Organized 1907. Matthist Givens, President.

AMONG THE MANY FAITHFUL WHO HAVE ASSISTED IN ADMINISTERING TO THE WELFARE OF THE PARISH, MAY BE MENTIONED THE FOLLOWING:

JAMES FORTEN.....nearly half century as Warden

JOHN EMORY, SOLOMON CLARKSON.....Church Clerks over 20 years

JOHN BOWERS.....Warden and Vestryman 40 years
CATO COLLINS..... " " " 40 "
JAMES NEEDHAM, SR..... " " " 40 "
SCIPIO SEWELL..... " " " 40 "
JOHN HART..... " " " 30 "
JOHN C. BOWERS, Organist..... " " " 40 "
MORRIS BROWN, Chorister..... " " " 40 "
WILLIAM P. PRICE..... " " " 50 "

JOHN MILLS, Organist and Choir Master.

Alfred Cassey,	Edward W. Venning,	Wm. Warrick,
Julia Bolivar, Teacher,	Hiram Montier,	James Douglas,
Margaret Oakley,	David Bowser,	Dr. E. C. Howard,
Jas. G. Davis,	Hamilton Wilson,	T. J. Minton,
T. J. Bowers,	U. B. Vidal,	Chas. McBee,
Edw. Collins,	Isaiah Miller,	Dr. James Howard,
Franklin Turner,	Geo. W. Bordley,	John Blasdale,
Amelia E. Mills,	Robt. Williams,	Dr. Wm. Slowe,
Clayton Miller,	Geo. Titus,	Jas. S. Ashe,
Octavius V. Catto,	Edward Banton.	J. T. Seth,
James Dover,	E. A. Bouchett,	Stanley Gilbert,
Edward E. Venning,	Wm. P. Allmond,	A. F. Stevens, Jr.